

1 Cor 1:10-17

## Introduction

The first issue that Paul deals with in the book of Corinthians is divisions in the church.

All we have to do is ask how many different Christian names and denominations there are.

The Spiritual Israel Church and its Army  
Alpha and Omega Brooklyn House of Prayer  
Macedonia First Born Church of the Living God  
Jesus the Son of the Living God Spiritual Baptist Church  
Church of Deliverance Tabernacle of Prayer  
More Than Conquerors Outreach Ministry Church  
Divine Guide Tabernacle of Faith Church  
Holy City Faith and Deliverance Ministries Center of Love  
Touch Not My Anointed  
Saint Andrews Temple Church of the Living God

It's a pretty common matter than in any church, Christian ministry, Christian school, parachurch organization, where there are two or more leaders, preachers working side by side, people will compare. To a point it's natural, as everything is on display (abilities, dress, personalities, cool factor, age, eloquence). I do it just as much as you do. I notice things. That's what happened at Corinth.

As a church and a leadership team, I'm pretty sure we're aware of these potential pitfalls, but we should not be too quick to think we're immune to them. God has truly blessed us over the past year. We went through a huge transition without a problem so far.

Today's message starts off with the devastations of divisions, but it ends with a renewed call for unity. Unity among leaders, unity in decision making, and unity in fellowship. God has so graciously spared us from real heart ache in this area, but we're only a half day away from this, and it so quickly tarnishes our witness in the world. That is natural, but how quickly that can deteriorate into factions and rivalry. Sometimes people talk as if the early church was known for a blissful and problem-free existence. Mostly that's just a reflection on what happened in Acts 2. But how much we see that is not true. Paul instantly had to deal with some serious problems. How many different issues could we drum up that have created divisions in church, both actual and potential?

## Apollos and the "report of factions" at Corinth

We should familiarize ourselves with a new character. Please turn to Acts 18, before we get to 1 Corinthians. Paul established this church on his second missionary trip, at the furthest Westward extent of his journey. The young church included some prominent figures from the Jews (Crispus ruler of synagogue), a Roman official named Titius Justus who opened up his house when the Jews closed the doors to this gospel message. God had told Paul, "do not be afraid, do not be silent, for I am with you and no one will harm you," and so under this divine protection Paul enjoyed more freedom than he had found in the previous places like Philippi and Thessalonica, and the church flourished. He was there a long time (a year and a half), and worked with his own hands in the tent making business of a couple of Roman Jews Aquila and Priscilla, who had come to Corinth to flee a persecution in Rome. We have already talked about that at greater length. Now, when he finally takes leave of Corinth (you can picture him pretty rough looking like an OT prophet – B/C of vow), he goes with Aquila and Priscilla across the Aegean Sea to Ephesus, which is in Modern Day Turkey. Paul continued alone back to Jerusalem and

eventually to Antioch. While Paul is gone, to Jerusalem, then Antioch and back to Ephesus, some important things happen. Another Jew from Egypt showed up in Ephesus. His name is Apollos.

**Read 18:24-25** Note that the text calls him an **eloquent** man, someone who could reason well from the Scriptures. So he knew the text, of course we're talking about the OT, and could expound on them and could show how Jesus was the Messiah. But notice also that he was deficient in his full understanding of the gospel at the time. "He knew only the baptism of John." This is kind of fun and interesting at the same time. He had been saved through a different strain, that hadn't come from the Apostles. Someone had heard about Jesus during His ministry, had made it back to Alexandria, and Apollos had been saved through that message. He had probably heard that Jesus had been crucified or raised, but somehow he hadn't come up to speed with all the teachings of Jesus, and probably not the Spirit and Pentecost.

A&P took him aside in Ephesus, and encouraged him in the scriptures more accurately. So now you have a high quality steel blade, honed to a razor's edge. Apollos was just one of those guys – he was good, and from everything we can tell from scripture, he was a genuine solid follower of God! They sent letters to Corinth, and Apollos went there and **considerably encouraged** the believers. While Apollos is in Corinth, Paul finds his way back to Ephesus (we don't hear of A&P), and has a huge ministry for upwards of three years. After some time Apollos leaves Corinth, he's obviously heard of Paul, and eventually even joins up with him in Ephesus, some 250 miles away (1 Cor 16:12).

With both leaders gone, the church at Corinth begins to have problems. Arguments and strife become the spiritual food. They begin to pit the leaders in their personal arguments and agendas. The potential danger that we see here, starts in every one of our hearts when we're captivated by the charisma of a particular man or woman that really speaks to us, "Wow, did you hear that! Apollos really hit it out of the park." I've said those things! He's the man, he's my man! As soon as that heart attitude creeps in (and it's very real in the Christian world), we've created a potential inroad for disruption. And pretty soon the discussion goes like this, "I'm going with Apollos on this one!" (John Calvin, John MacArthur, John Piper) This isn't unfamiliar territory to us. You and I have been in those discussions where the big names are rallying points. You bring yours and I'll bring mine!

Paul is in Ephesus and he writes this in **1:11-12**, **"It has been reported to me by Chloe's people, that there is quarreling among you my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, 'I follow Paul,' or 'I follow Apollos,' or 'I follow Cephas,' or 'I follow Christ.'"**

They are quarreling and being divisive, rallying around their favorite teachers. There's no hint that this was created by the teachers, but in some way this quarreling was being carried along in the name of wisdom. We infer this because this topic of divisions and wisdom is completely interlaced over the next 3 chapters. "Where is the one who is wise?" What is with all these divisions? "what is wisdom in this world, and who are the wise people?"

Were they boasting in these men? Paul gives numerous warnings against boasting (3:21, 1:29) and being "puffed up against one another (4:6)." The key thoughts that help me frame this section: a polemic about true wisdom, the destruction created by party lines, boasting in a favorite man, being puffed up against each other. It's the classic spiritual discussion where everyone is talking with an appearance of godliness, using the right terms, but totally acting carnally! It happens all the time. They're using the names to get what they really want, which is glory, the attention of men, the

movement of their agendas, and it's covered over in the spiritual façade of wisdom, while they continue to be carnal and vie for power within the church. Carnality is at the center of these divisions, not a desire for truth.

A blog post I just read this week, "Look at what this is doing to the body of Christ. Look at the way these comments are going after on another, ripping at each others' throats, slashing at each others' characters. ... I do know this for certain: Satan is loving every ugly bit of this. He is taking full advantage of the fact that a house divided cannot stand."

Back to the first century version, "I follow Paul, I follow Apollos." We know them, but Peter is a bit of an enigma in that we aren't sure if he visited Corinth or not. There's hints he might have, but we just don't know. But either way he functions as another power name in the game? The clue to all this is the last name, "I follow Christ!" At first glance we might think, what's wrong with that? Paul doesn't say to the last division, this is the correct one. Sure it's the right idea, but this faction had just turned "belonging to Christ" into a division that allowed them in the fight.

The point is there shouldn't be any divisions, and his heart is obviously heavy about this. I hear disappointment in his heart when he mentions in 3:1-4, **"I could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ."** I see him shaking his head at the hurt this was creating within the church. They had the appearance of acting in a spiritual manner [talking about something related to theology, or wisdom, or the church], but outcome of their behavior demonstrated how much the flesh had a grip on them. They wanted to win the arguments. They wanted personal honor by association. "I'm in his camp!" The party lines and the name dropping was part of the propagation of jealousies and strife in a fleshly and splintered church. They had lost sight of what mattered in Jesus. They had lost sight of the heart of the gospel.

Appeal - When we get entwined in these juicy problems, we begin to tarnish the name of God. How quickly this can become a reality among the people of God. Rarely are problems about the discovery of truth. Many times, the issues that divide a church are opinion based, a façade to power struggles, the demonstration of a prideful heart, refusing to accept correction, emphasizing a hobby horse, or being puffed up. This happens all the time, and I would imagine that if I were to ask for a show of hands right now in this church, on how many of us at some point have been through a church split, a leadership division, jealousy over ministries, arguments over money decisions, power struggles and pride... a sea of hands right here would go up. The unfortunate outcome is a disunity that robs our joy, sucks out the effective power of the church, and causes dishonor to the name of Jesus in the world.

### Be careful of being enamored by a person

Be careful of too much influence by one person. A personality cult is not new. You expect it out there in the rock star world or in politics. But it exists among the people of God, in churches, on our favorite Christian blog, in a youth group. Maybe a Christian author has grown larger than life, a pastor, a church musician (that one voice or musical talent), or your home fellowship group leader who is so sweet. It's very easy to love someone's public figure. Let's be careful!

Just because some is a strong and effective leader doesn't mean there's necessarily something wrong. There's nothing wrong with being well-liked, or even growing insanely famous. Being loved by ten people or ten thousand people is not wrong. The problem, either on a small scale, or on a large scale, is

when a human person creates a distraction or a barrier to the unity that is meant to be built in the person of Jesus Christ.

Look at 1:9

It's easy to fall in love with the way a person crafts a thought, delivers a message, lives a life of faith, or reasons through an argument. I've been captivated many times along the way by amazing people. Apollos was captivating in this regard. When people heard his message they said the words "eloquent!" Let's add more, "genius, smart, enthralling, so sincere, honest, godly!" Some people are so out of the box, they're captivating because of their uniqueness. This would be like Ezekiel in the OT. He laid on his side for a year to prove a point. One verse has always stuck out to me, "You are to them like one who sings a lustful song with a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument..." Ez 33:32. Some people just have that effect! More often than not they are great people! But, too much attraction to one author, theologian or leader, has a few potential pitfalls:

1. Blind following – This is so hard to see but I've personally felt it. Your esteem of someone grows and grows and pretty soon you just take his view, her position simply because you trust them. And it might be great most of the time, but what happens is that you've slowly moved from the text of the Bible and grabbed on to a man's opinion. It also can cause laziness. I don't do the work myself. "Honestly how could I do better, I don't know how to study as much!" Of course you can! Don't be afraid of having your own thoughts that come from the Bible, no matter how big the person. If we think we're beyond this, let's be careful.
2. Over-dogmatism. Have you ever heard someone be strong about a theological topic and wonder, did they actually get to that conclusion from the Bible and their own study? Most of the time, they heard it from more influential person, internalized it and said it one notch stronger, riding the sweet coattails of someone's erudition and influence.
3. Disappointment. A very honest danger of giving someone too much admiration is that sooner or later you find out he or she is not exactly how you thought, and you either whitewash what you see, or it turns to bitter disappointment. I have seen that so many times!
4. Becoming anemic - that is being fed through one straw. I have all his books, all his messages, listened to every podcast. I recognize the special place of someone who introduced us to Christ, or founded the church (as in Corinth), or has an uncanny way with words (Apollos). Of course we want to learn from that person. Is there a healthy balance where we learn from others? Is there a disappointment when your person isn't preaching that Sunday? It's a guest speaker, or a missionary from the Philippines? **Pat Johnson – mentor?**
5. Defensiveness when your hero is attacked? I have seen friendships break up over Calvinism. That is not right! Some people love to be in the middle of juicy Christian dialogues, debates and discussions. Let's be able to ask the question, are these comments building the kingdom of God, or is this just banter?

From my experience, I would say that most of the time, like here in Corinth, the followers create the unhealthy balance. But that's not to say there isn't plenty of opportunities for leaders to cash-in on this for their own power and gains. Whether it's a speaker, preacher, author, teacher... whether it's in front of the largest masses or a small town like Middleton, to the bible study leader on Friday night. I'll just put forward three questions:

1. Do you love the praise and respect of men? Of course the right answer is no, but let's try to be honest. "Yes, most of us do!" Deep in our heart, the enemy wants us to crave for followers, to be thought of as great, that people look up to you or your great answers? Of course that's a reality for anyone with influence, so it's simply a matter of being honest about it and continually submitted to Jesus! I am so blessed when people write a little note, a little something expressing their love toward us. There's some of you that are so good at that and it's a gift of God. But like every good thing, without asking God for honest heart checks, how easily does the good desire to be loved, slowly mutate into an unhealthy desire for admiration and reverence?
2. Are you the lynchpin that holds everything in your ministry together? If you are removed out of the picture (by a bus), does the ministry continue or does attendance disappear? Do all the systems break because you hold the keys? This is something that takes effort, but are people empowered at high levels to be part of the process, so that you haven't made?
3. Where does the power lie? Who makes the decisions, who moves the money, who calls the shots? Are you accessible and transparent, or untouchable?

It's not wrong, nor is it a sin to be popular, famous, or growing a ministry exponentially. It is simply a tool and a potential place for sin to find a foothold. Though it is not always created by the leader, the leader has the responsibility to be aware of his own tendencies and the tendencies among the people. Look how Paul appeals to the Corinthians!

Paul begs them to correct this. He doesn't rally his "Paul" group! **1:10, "I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment."** I beg you not to have divisions. The term he uses is *schismata* the Greek word for *schisms*. It's the term used for a torn fishing net or a torn garment. What are you going to do with a net that has a hole in it, or a blouse where the sleeve and collar is gone.

Did you notice in the section from last week, v.9, "we were called into the fellowship of Jesus Christ!"

### [Divisions in the church deeply scar the individual members of that body](#)

We could probably do a good job to sew up the tears, but we will always see the scar. I know of many people in our church, that have been *seriously* wounded by a church division. I have some scars! My wife has some scars! I know that as I'm talking many of you are remembering a wound from a decade, maybe two or three, and it doesn't seem like that long ago. When you give your heart and love to the people of a church, to leaders you love, and friends you worked side by side with, it creates a deep bond. It's suppose to! Divisions leaves a huge and painful scar. It's not the same as a political break up, or getting a new job. It's hard to keep divisions among believers at arm's length, because we're brothers and sisters under Jesus. We still both love and serve Him, but our relationship is all messed up and it hurts deep.

### [Agreement and unity should be eagerly sought in a healthy church](#)

**In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ...** Paul asks for two things from the church in Corinth: 1) agreement, and 2) unity in mind and judgment. This is so important in a local church body. Unity is so important to us here at FCBC. I can say that we work hard at being in agreement, and of a united mind and judgment.

Is it possible that we all agree like Paul is asking? I recognize some potential tension, but I do think the answer is yes, it is possible. Let me share with you how we attempt to apply this verse in our body. At the elder level we always seek to have unanimity and agreement in doctrine and decision making, in counseling issues, and prioritizing projects. This can be hard work at times or create some hard discussions (in fact there's some hard discussions we need to have right now based on the subjects coming up in 1 Corinthians). Nevertheless we are committed to discussing, for long periods of time if necessary, until we can reach full agreement and there are no divisions. Four to two doesn't work! **9 "We are called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."** How often does a church get busy with stuff and suddenly find themselves far from the fellowship that is found in Jesus Christ. If we can establish and demonstrate this fellowship in Jesus Christ from the top, it's our hope that it trickles through every ministry, at every level. Think of all the ministries, all the various leaders and many possible ways that church can function practically. The potential for differences of opinions and application of differences is great. At the elder level we strive in every way for doctrinal and leadership agreement. At the ministry level, it's very possible that individual people who call this church their home might have some differences from our doctrinal statement, could potentially do things differently, or have a different flavor of worship, but be totally at home here in "the fellowship of Jesus."

At the church level, "Paul doesn't seem to require uniformity in every detail of doctrine, but a non-competitive attitude that sets aside all hints of power play." Anthony Thieselton, 40. Rarely are divisions truly about doctrine, most of the time those are just cover ups for personal offenses.

When Paul asks the rhetorical question v.13, "is Christ divided?" the answer is, "no, Christ is united!" So, when we are divided in a church, we have lost the essence of what the fellowship of Jesus Christ is all about. When we have schisms among believers, Jesus Christ is shamed, no matter what great thing we're doing. When the body of Christ is splintered, it's effective power is reduced to nothing. In the midst of it the individuals are hurt deeply.

And this is one thing we can be assured of. The enemy wants to destroy what is good. He is roaming around looking for an opportunity to destroy our church, or any church. That's not a scare tactic, that's just a reality. But we have all the power in the world at our disposal. As we individual members put on the gospel daily, as we focus on Jesus daily, as we clothe ourselves with humility toward one another, the enemy's power literally disintegrates. It's so counter human intuition. When things get heated everything in our instinct says man up, defend yourself, defend your case, you're not in the wrong, she is.

[To get back on track, keep your eyes on Jesus](#)

It's the theme for this year. But when we look at Jesus, our personal agendas gently fade. When gospel reminds us that it's about His kingdom, unity reigns and the enemy has no power over us. When Jesus is central, we are protected. Danger looms nearby when we forget that dependence, or think that we're immune, or cease to be humble under Jesus.

Paul asks some simple rhetorical questions that remind us to look to Jesus. **Read V.13-16.**

Those rhetorical questions are meant to accomplish one thing, "Paul can do nothing for you!" Jesus can. Another human leader, pastor, mentor can do nothing of eternal value for me. We love them dearly, but we are side by side co-laborers. They can point us in the right direction, but we are each given a job

in the gospel picture. We're just doing a job for the Lord, and it needs to have a unifying effect, not a divisive effect. When you lose track of Jesus, it becomes a personal kingdom, with personal offenses.

How do we keep our eyes on Jesus? When a new tension appears, ask the question, "is this difficulty in any way about me? Am I trying to hold on to something that belongs to Jesus? Has my shadow overshadowed His? Do I want the control that belongs to Jesus? Am I trying to manipulate outcomes that Jesus is capable of handling in His church?" [Divisions over coffee, how much to spend on carpet, electing new elders, what to do with money]

Suddenly freedom emerges in unity and agreement. It's actually fun to find different solutions in agreement, that you never thought existed. I'll step outside the church for a moment and give a personal example. **Saturday mornings!** I've come to enjoy the different approach.

**3:5, "What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each.**

Looking to Jesus instantly reminds us of our position. We are servants. Servants here in this church, servants in another ministry perhaps – Servants of Christ.

**I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth."**

It doesn't mean that we have no value. We can't bring any spiritual growth, that's all of God, but we have service value in pointing people to Jesus, in bringing people with us to Jesus, in directing everything toward the kingdom of Jesus. We are a piece of the puzzle, a billion piece puzzle. **He who plants and he who waters are one..."** To me that ties up the thought that he started in 1:10 – We are one, I appeal for agreement and unity of mind and judgment.

### **Illustration of solar field**

[Let's be fervent to seek unity among the believers in Jesus Christ](#)

Ephesians 4:3-6, "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." Here is where the work lies.

Psalm 133:1, "behold how good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity. It is like oil dripping down the beard of Aaron."

The ultimate fulfillment of this, in its sweetest form, is waiting for us in heaven. The reality around us is that disunity wants to be a reigning master in every part of our lives: that relationship with your brother that has just turned bristly, that disagreement with our spouse that wants to fester or get swept under the carpet, a once close friend that feels distant, an awkward conversation that needs to be had with that person sitting right over there, at work. The flesh and carnality is ok with disunity, but the fellowship of Jesus Christ say, "no way, it's not ok!" Heaven isn't here yet, but we are equipped by Jesus, to achieve heavenlike unity right now. We can display heaven's realities. Here's how:

1. We center everything around Jesus. If an argument or a relationship gets out of balance, and Jesus starts to fade, then the desire for unity fades as well. Somehow we've become more prominent, and Christ has taken a back seat. Let's get him back in the front.

2. We recognize differences exist. Of course differences exist, can we let some of them be here among us? The reality is that we will have disagreement. Does the issue really have to cause division in the body of Christ? If the difference is too sharp to bear personally, can we be more gentle about it? Can we move on without offence? Can we minimize any hurt among believers? When sin is involved it is not easy. Every situation requires specialized love and attention, but neither do we ignore sin for the sake of unity.
3. We err on the side of forgiveness and humility. Is it possible to let this one go?
4. We emphasize restored relationships.

## Church plant

I can't think of a better time to emphasize the church plant that you might have started to hear us talk about. We're actually trying to help launch a new local body in East Boise. Is there anyone here (single/family/young/old) whom God might be calling to be a part of this new family. A church plant is really different than this! It starts from ground zero, and we have no idea who God is going to bring, or what it is going to look like?

But one thing I know we need are some people who are committed to the fellowship and unity of Jesus who say, "I'll go!" Maybe you'd be willing to say, "I'll give it one year, to serve, and help develop people." A church plant is totally different than what we have here. In fact, possibly this setting could foster laziness, or doesn't give you a place to exercise your gifts. Maybe you're at a time when you need all this establishment, but maybe you're at a place where God is nudging you to potentially get your hands dirty in a start up. There's going to be people coming into that church plant from every walk of life, unchurched, churched, and maybe immature Christians. They would love to have solid believers who are suited up and ready to work, ready for the adventure of growing through issues, ready to work through a thousand different questions of what it means to be the body of Christ, how to grow leaders, and impact a community.

Here's why this is a fun plug at the end. It's a perfect application of this passage. There's no fear in the fellowship of Jesus. There's no competition in the fellowship of Jesus. We're not competing for people, for space, for numbers, we're partnering to make Jesus great. Why not have church camp together, why not trade speakers, why not share money and resources and buildings and advertising space, and encourage good people to go!

Paul and Apollos and Peter, and all of us are on the same team. Let's work hard at not forgetting the unity we desperately need to make that Jesus a reality to lost people.

One final thought. If you would like personal prayer right now for an issue in your life, we would love to make that a reality. I know for a fact any of the elders would make themselves available to you right now, and so would many others around us.

## Conclusion